

12500 SWIRL LANE (HOUSE)
(The Colonial)
(The Gladstone)
Belair at Bowie, Maryland
Bowie
Prince George's County
Maryland

HABS MD-1260
MD-1260

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
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12500 SWIRL LANE (HOUSE) (The Colonial) (The Gladstone)

HABS No. MD-1260

NOTE: Please see the following historical reports for additional information about the history of Belair at Bowie, Maryland:

Belair at Bowie, Maryland (overview)	HABS No. MD-1253
12418 Stonehaven Lane (The Cape Cod)	HABS No. MD-1254
12420 Stonehaven Lane (The Cape Cod)	HABS No. MD-1255
12408 Stonehaven Lane (The Rancher)	HABS No. MD-1257
12100 Tulip Grove Drive (The Rancher)	HABS No. MD-1263
12400 Shadow Lane (The Colonial, 3 bedroom)	HABS No. MD-1264
Belair Bath & Tennis Club	HABS No. MD-1265
12401 Sussex Lane (The Manor House)	HABS No. MD-1267
12405 Sussex Lane (The Rancher)	HABS No. MD-1269
12413 Salem Lane (The Country Clubber)	HABS No. MD-1270
12406 Skylark Lane (The Country Clubber)	HABS No. MD-1271

Location: 12500 Swirl Lane, "Belair at Bowie, Maryland," Bowie, Prince Georges County, Maryland.

Significance: The house at 12500 Swirl Lane is a representative example of the four-bedroom variation of The Colonial model constructed at Belair. It occupies a high-profile corner lot in the Somerset section and is virtually unchanged on its exterior from the time of construction in 1960-61. The three- and four-bedroom options for The Colonial model at Belair, each with a distinctive façade, were carryovers from Levittown, New Jersey, although Levitt and Sons did redesign parts of the floor plans and elevations when devising the 1961 model line. The Colonials shared an identical first-floor plan that featured the increasingly popular family room. This feature was bigger and more centrally accessible than the one in the comparable two-story model built in the first sections of Levittown, New Jersey, which, notably, was the first "true" family room offered by Levitt and Sons in any of its models. To gain additional space for a fourth bedroom in The Colonial, Levitt architects created an overhang by cantilevering the second floor out over the first on the street elevation. Known in period literature as a "garrison" front, such an arrangement was believed to recall a supposed defensive strategy used in construction of seventeenth-century houses of New England. This nod to the colonial past was one of a number of architectural elements that comprised an overarching traditional theme guiding the design of most of the Belair house façades.

Historian: James A. Jacobs, HABS

Description: The four-bedroom Colonial at number 12500 is located at the northeast corner of the intersection of Swirl and Stonehaven lanes. Although ostensibly just three- and four-bedroom versions of the same model—both have identical first-floor plans—Levitt and Sons further varied the streetscape by maintaining a distinct façades for each type. The garrison front gave the four-bedroom Colonial a substantial presence, which was furthered by the oriels flanking the front door, each containing three double-hung sash and “supported” by molded wood corbels. The symmetrical arrangement of the main-block façade and its organization into three vertical bays was echoed in the second story by a single shuttered, double-hung window above the door (originally having shutters) flanked by pairs of double-hung sash with shutters over the oriels. The lower portion of the façade is sheathed in brick and the upper in cedar shingles, which are also used on the front of the one-car garage wing positioned to the right and forward of the main block. The remainder of the house is covered in asbestos shingles.

History: Available in three- and four-bedroom versions, each with its own facade variation, The Colonial at Belair was a direct descendent of the largest of the initial models at Levittown, New Jersey.¹ Despite its early experience in the 1930s with models having a full two stories, Levitt and Sons abandoned them for a decade beginning with Levittown, New York. By the end of the 1950s, the escalating cost of suburban land, expanding wish lists among prospective buyers, and growing nostalgia for colonial-era history returned two-story models to the forefront of the industry. In 1957, Levitt and Sons introduced a two-story model with 1,500 square feet called The Colonial for the final sections of Levittown, Pennsylvania, as a way to provide people with “more house” without using more land, which was becoming a greater percentage of the cost of a new house with each passing year. They launched Levittown, New Jersey, one year later with an enlarged and reworked version of their two-story model, which was known as House C.² As originally designed, this model is notable for Levitt and Sons because it was the company’s first postwar house to include a space that could be considered a “family room,” which became one of the hallmarks of new middle-class houses built over the next decade.³

Levitt and Sons used the three- and four-bedroom variations of the two-story model available in New Jersey as the basis for two types of Colonial in its 1961 product line, which was intended both for Belair and for new sections in New Jersey. The neo-traditional street elevations fronted a house that was otherwise fully equipped and thoroughly modern. The three- and four-bedroom Colonials had identical first-floor

¹ “Bill Levitt’s Third Big Town: More Value for Less Money,” *House & Home* 80 (Aug. 1958): 80-81, and “Look How Bill Levitt Is Meeting the Changing Market: More House, More Money, More Value,” *House & Home* 16 (Sep. 1959): 138-39, for two-story models at Levittown, New Jersey.

² Advertisement, “This Is Levittown, New Jersey,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* 13 Jul. 1958, sec. W: 34, for House C.

³ For more on the development of the family room, see James A. Jacobs, “Social and Spatial Change in the Postwar Family Room,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 13 (2006): 70-85.

plans, providing an integral garage, a separate laundry area with standard washing machine and matching clothes dryer, and, most notably, whole house central air conditioning—a luxury at the time expected only in the most expensive new houses (fig. 1).⁴ With central air conditioning and laundry equipment offered in all models, most prospective buyers were likely satisfied with kitchens that came equipped with only a stove and refrigerator; only the two highest priced models featured standard dishwashers and in-sink garbage disposers. Still, the kitchens in all of the models were efficiently arranged with U-shaped layouts and nearly all included provisions for casual dining within or adjacent to the kitchen's work area. This feature was fast becoming indispensable to middle-class buyers and was present in The Colonials in the form of a family room, which was open to but screened from the kitchen proper by the breakfast bar with overhead cabinets.

In addition to a large and equipped kitchen and adjacent family room, a front door that did not open directly into the living room, a clearly-defined “formal” dining area, and multiple bathrooms were at the top of the list of consumer wants around the time that Levitt and Sons was devising the Belair models. All of these elements were found in the revamped Colonials and contributed to their popularity among buyers. They featured a front door that opened onto a “true center hall,” which provided individual access to the living, dining, and family rooms and contained a powder room convenient to all areas of the first floor.⁵ Both the three- and four-bedroom versions offered master bedrooms with en suite bathrooms in addition to a second full bath servicing the other bedrooms. The relatively large and well-arranged Colonials found immediate interest among the somewhat conservative tastes and more solidly middle-class identity of prospective buyers in metropolitan Washington. Only nine months after Belair opened, these models were “leading the sales parade” among the 1,203 contracts already signed.⁶

Selected Bibliography:

Advertisement. “This Is Levittown, New Jersey.” The Philadelphia Inquirer 13 Jul. 1958. Sec. W: 34.

“New Marketing Trends: The Case of Bill Levitt.” House & Home 19 (Jan. 1961): 175-177.

Levitt and Sons, Inc. “Belair at Bowie, Maryland.” 1962.

“Levitt Sales Total 1203.” The Washington Post 24 Jun. 1961. Sec. B: 9.

⁴ Levitt and Sons, Inc., “Belair at Bowie, Maryland,” 1962, for information about included features and amenities. In author's collection.

⁵ “New Marketing Trends: The Case of Bill Levitt,” *House & Home* 19 (Jan. 1961): 177.

⁶ “Levitt Sales Total 1203,” *The Washington Post* 24 Jun. 1961, sec. B: 9.

Project Information:

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APPENDIX A: ILLUSTRATIONS

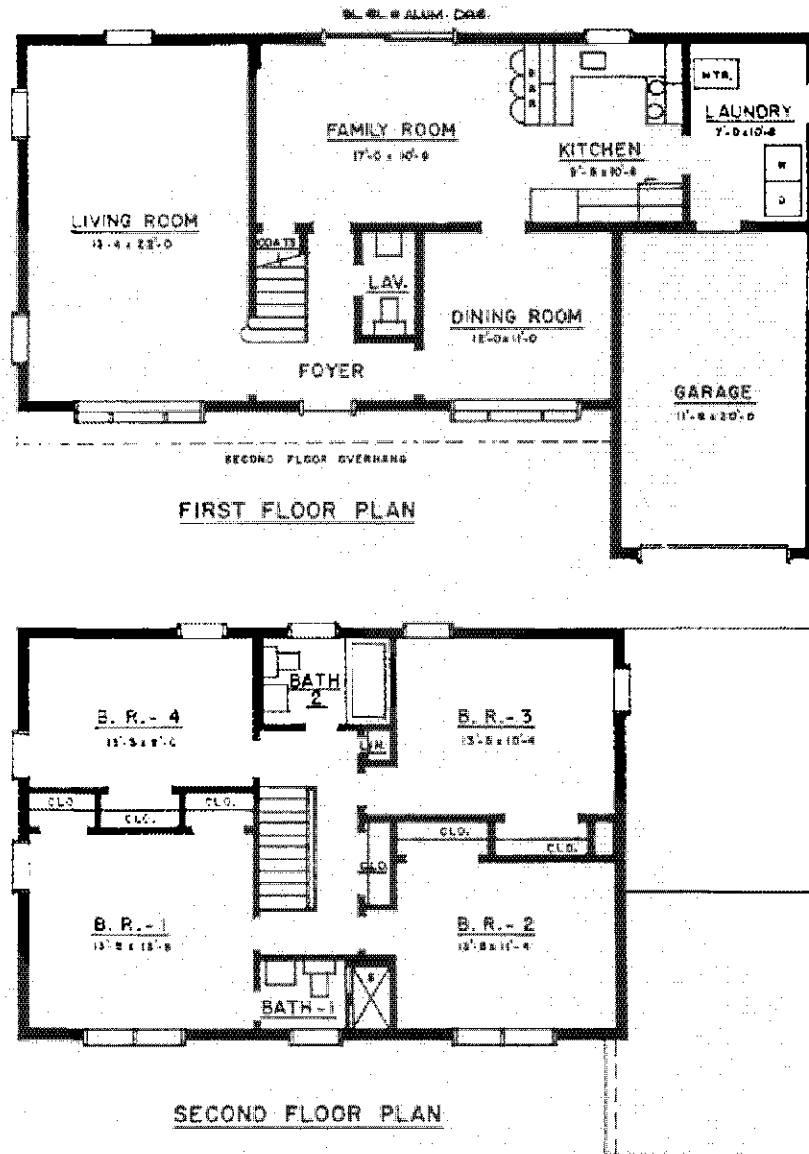


Fig. 1. The Colonial model, version with four bedrooms, floor plans, 1964. Author's collection.